

# Soul-Deep Feelings for Peking University and Christ's Salvation

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My relationship with Peking University began with my parents.

Both my parents were born in a small town in Fujian province. They both came from peasant families. In 1959 my father was admitted to Peking University; he majored in chemistry. He stayed at Peking University and joined the faculty after graduation. Later my mom transferred to a teaching position at the affiliated high school of Peking University. I was born at the university's school hospital and grew up attending the university's affiliated preschool, elementary school, and high school. Then in 1992, I received a recommendation to attend Peking University and later became a student of chemistry at the school.

Peking University is imprinted in my bones. It is even part of my name.<sup>i</sup> All my neighbors and my parents' friends were instructors, professors, or researchers at Peking University and Tsinghua University, but I never knew if any of them were Christians.

## Searching for the Meaning of Life

Like most people born in China during the 70s, I was brought up with an atheistic education. However, I was never really a strong believer in atheism; I always felt that there are things that we can't see or touch, but they truly exist. When I was about 10 years old, I thought about the difficult question of death.

I still remember that at that time my family bought a 12-inch, black-and-white TV and we watched a TV show called "Forget Me Not." In that show, the character, played by Shu Fang, was a highly educated person who was sent to work in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution. When he received a telegram that his father was dying, he immediately hurried home. But when he arrived, his father had already passed away. He was only able to see the smoke rising from the crematorium. When I saw that scene, I was shocked and scared. I could almost feel the complete darkness and silence brought by death. To me, death meant eternal separation from sunshine, warmth, laughter, and loved ones.

I felt strongly that this could not possibly be what the end of life

would look like. Life is too beautiful to end that way!

But the pressures of life did not give me more time to think about this. Primary school, middle school, and high school—every step I took, I tried my best to get the highest scores. I worked very hard until I was accepted into Peking University. When that was done, I had finally fulfilled the first important goal of my life. At that time, I was filled with passion and was determined to be the Madame Curie of China. But for the first time, I clearly saw my limits. I suddenly realized that my intelligence, physical power, energy, and abilities were not that extraordinary. My dream of being a great scientist was shattered. I wondered about the meaning of life.

At that time, I started to examine my life. What I found was selfishness, laziness, pride, and comfort-seeking. By this time, it was the 90s and the economy was soaring because of the reform and opening up policy. However, what came with it was a polluted environment, corrupted morality, the worship of money, and diminished dignity. I knew deeply that I was a sinner and everyone else was a sinner as well. My heart was thirsty for holiness even though I did not know where this yearning came from. The harder I tried, however, the tighter the bondage of sin became. I felt I was struggling in vain. When I wanted to help and care for others, selfishness stopped me; when I wanted to congratulate my friend for succeeding, jealousy pierced me. This continued for several years, until I started having dull headaches.

### **Grabbed by a Strange Touch**

In the eyes of others, my life was plain sailing. I graduated from college, went abroad, and then got married—all of which went very smoothly. I was even given the opportunity to work at the same company where my husband worked when I was still in graduate school. But in my heart, I knew how puzzled I was and the struggles I had deep within me. In the end, I realized what I yearned for was salvation. I looked forward to a hand coming down from heaven to lift me out of my sins, cleanse me, and take me to a bright and holy place. But where would this kind of salvation come from? I didn't know the answer, but I knew I had to get it, or I would never have true peace and happiness.

When I was pursuing my graduate degree in Evanston, Illinois, two Korean PhD students who worked in the same lab with me told me about Jesus and shared the gospel with me. A young woman from

Macao, Amanda, who worked for another boss, was also there and told me she was a Christian, too. At that time, I thought people who went to church were strange. We finally had come out of a blind worship in China, how could we dive into another form of blind worship again?

I told Amanda the questions in my heart, she smiled and told me, “It is wrong to worship man, but God is worthy of our worship.”

“But I’ve heard that God killed a lot of people in the Old Testament?” I said. In fact, I had not really read the Bible myself; what I knew was mostly what I had heard from others. I tried to read the Bible once when I was in high school, but when I came to passages like “so and so gave birth to so and so, and he lived for a few hundred years and died,” I felt extremely bored. I put down the Bible after only a few pages.

Amanda frowned, “God has his right to do what he decides to do, because our lives are given by him.”

Each time my Korean friends told me about Jesus, the final judgement, and heaven and hell, I was fascinated. On my way back from work I thought to myself, “I will just believe in Jesus.” After I got home, I called my husband who was working in another city. I suggested that maybe we should believe in Jesus. My husband answered with a very firm “No,” so I decided I would not think about this anymore. I focused on my work, my lab experiments, my work visa application, and my reunion with my husband. But at the same time, I still had confusion and struggles in my heart.

Since my work visa wouldn’t start until October 1, 1999, I decided to use the Labor Day holiday in September to hang out with my college friends XinSheng Wang and Jingyue Yang. Wang studied in Missouri and Yang in Kansas. At that time, Wang was already a believer and she arranged for us to attend a Chinese Christian retreat at the Lake of the Ozarks. I only went to visit my friends and wasn’t planning on listening to the gospel. I even debated with my friends on why we shouldn’t believe in Jesus.

But when the pastor gave an altar call, I was touched and could not find a good reason to reject Jesus, so I stood up. A sister immediately came over to lead me in prayer. When I told her I was not ready, she looked embarrassed and didn’t know what to do.

After the trip, I returned to Chicago in a happy mood. That Friday, when I got off from work, Amanda came over and asked how the retreat was. I told her about standing up when the pastor gave the altar call and that I was willing to be a Christian, but not ready yet. Amanda told me in a serious way, “It is God who decides when you become a Christian, not you.” I felt that was God talking to me through her.

The next day, September 11, 1999, was a Saturday. It was early fall, and the weather was sunny and hot. That afternoon, a schoolmate drove me to a grocery store to do some shopping. On the way I was very unsettled, and I felt a strong impulse urging me to not step back, but to become a Christian. Even though I heard no special voice nor saw a vision, the feeling was real and true. When I got back from the grocery store, I wanted to make one last attempt to say no to God, so I called my husband. But when the line connected, we could only hear loud noises. There was no way we could talk.

I hung up the phone. I knew there was no way to back down now but wondered what the gospel is. What does it mean to believe in Jesus? I dug out the tape Amanda had given me previously. It was a recording of some sermons. I laid in my narrow bunk bed and listened to it. Tears rolled down my face, but my heart was lightened and relieved. I finally found what I had been looking for. I had wandered too long, and now I was finally home!

### **Life Changed by Faith**

It has been more than twenty years now since I became a child of God on September 11, 1999. I thank God that I have often felt “a love like the endless chirping of summer cicadas and the unending silk of spring silkworms; and a voice urging me to go forward boldly as the Spirit leads my heart.”<sup>ii</sup> When I first came to the Lord, I was broken and weak from inside out. It was only by his unfailing love and power that my old life, was restored with new life. I was healed, saved, cleansed, and renewed. I was also used by him in his work. I was like an onion, being peeled one layer after another.

At first, I stopped taking papers and pens from my company, and stopped telling lies. Then, I started to read God’s word and pour out my heart before the Lord. Later, I pursued holiness, and started to love what God loves and hate what God hates. Then I learned to trust and obey him, to surrender to God and patiently wait for him. Now I have followed God for

twenty years and have been through many things in life. I witnessed how my parents came to the Lord, were baptized, and finally went to be with the Lord. My best friend was diagnosed with cancer. I have been yoked with an unbelieving husband and led my son and daughter to the Lord by myself. I witnessed the drastic changes in world politics, and saw that the world's value have gone further and further away from God.

Praise the Lord, that every time I fell down, God used his word, his Spirit, pastors and ministers, brothers and sisters in the Lord to comfort, guide, encourage, and rebuke me. Every time, he helped me get back on my feet.

And of course, I also experienced God's healing and protection. For example, six years ago, my Toyota Corolla was rear-ended by a welding pickup truck. The truck's front bumper was bent and yet my small car was not even scratched.

I experienced refreshment from God when I was tired. I experienced the satisfaction of understanding God's word. I experienced peace from God when I was praying. I experienced excitement when I shared the gospel. I experienced unity when I was working with God and his people. I also experienced the joy of being healed from a broken life and set free by him.

### **Peace and Safety in the COVID-19 Pandemic**

The pandemic arrived in 2020. At the time of this writing, I have stayed at home for four months. Ever since the first COVID case in January, the number of confirmed cases in America has soared to over three million and the death count has reached over 130,000. I have had a relatively smooth life, but seeing that data, I feel heartbroken and helpless.

At the end of January, our local Chinese churches were still organizing celebrations for the Chinese New Year, and we were talking about whether we should ask family members who came to visit from China to self-quarantine for two weeks. In February, we started to pray earnestly for Wuhan. We also connected with the Peking University Alumni Association and some local Chinese organizations to donate money to the medical staff on the front line. In March, we had COVID cases in our state. Everyone started to store up water, food, medication, masks, sanitizers, and gloves. All our routines suddenly came to a stop. My children came back home and started online classes; my husband and I started to work from home.

All our connections to the outside world became online—phone calls, WeChat, YouTube, Zoom meetings, and so on. Our home has become our office, meeting room, classroom, worship hall, gym, and dance room.

However, even when daily activities were put on pause by the pandemic, we had this rare chance to enjoy quietness. My husband's business trips were canceled, and I no longer needed to drive my children to school, or to pick them up. My children also had time to stay at home. We got to enjoy family time during our meals every day, and we talked about everything.

Yet what was most precious was that I finally had time to be still before the Lord Jesus and listen to his voice. One Friday, we were studying Mathew 11:16–19 in our Bible study. It was about Jesus rebuking the people who not only rejected the harsh message from John the Baptist, but also turned down the gentle message from the Lord. I felt it was speaking to me. Ever since COVID started, we have heard many preachers talk about repentance and prayer. The White House announced March 15 as a national day of prayer. Anne, daughter of Billy Graham, prayed a prayer of confession and repentance for the sins of the nation. There were all kinds of prayer groups spreading on the internet.

But despite all these, we did not see any signs of repentance or revival in our daily lives. A brother at our church shared how the early church was persecuted, and that when the disciples were scattered, there were no visible immediate changes either. But when they looked back years later, they could clearly see the wondrous workings of God. I responded to this with, “Amen! O Lord, give me patience so I will not make a quick judgement, but patiently wait for your mighty work. Help me to not see the speck in my brother's eye and ignore the plank in my own eye.” Repentance starts from cleansing my own heart.

When working from home first started, I was given a big project. It kept me busy throughout the day and even took up my family time. Finally, I finished it in time. However, when my work was handed over to another department, they rejected it. During the following weeks, I had to meet with and talk to a team leader, a manager, a director, and the vice-

president. The whole process went back and forth until we finally reached an agreement on the results of my work. I had to make countless graphs for the data in my project. I felt very defeated and anxious. But thanks to the Lord, he spoke to me through Mathew 11:28–30, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” This verse not only helped me find approval and value in him, but also gave me rest.

I’m also grateful that someone in the Peking University Christian Alumni group shared A.W. Tozer’s article titled “Meekness and Rest.” Tozer wrote:

The meek man is not a human mouse afflicted with a sense of his own inferiority. Rather he may be in his moral life as bold as a lion and as strong as Samson; but he has stopped being fooled about himself. He has accepted God’s estimate of his own life. He knows he is as weak and helpless as God has declared him to be, but paradoxically, he knows at the same time that he is in the sight of God of more importance than angels. In, himself, nothing; in God, everything. That is his motto. He knows well that the world will never see him as God sees him and he has stopped caring. He rests perfectly content to allow God to place his own values.

Thank the Lord, my graphs finally received the recognition from my supervisors and this event helped me practice humility, obedience, and patience. I was also able to learn to rest in him.

On Saturday May 2, the weather was gloomy and so was my mood. At dusk, after a quick storm passed by, a double rainbow appeared in the sky above the racecourse. The rainbow was so bright and beautiful; it was as if the door to heaven was opened. A verse came to my mind:

There is none like God, O Jeshurun, who rides through the heavens to your help, through the skies in his majesty. The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms. And he thrust out the enemy before you and said, “Destroy.” (Deuteronomy 33:26-27)

The burden of my heart was suddenly lifted, as if God comforted me

and said, “My child, take heart. I am in control of everything.”

On Sunday May 10, the person presiding over our online Sunday service was a sister who worked as a physical therapist. She told us that a few of the older patients and the medical staff at her workplace were diagnosed with COVID. When she got home, she had to stay away from her daughter. She stayed in her room and had to put on a mask and gloves whenever she stepped out of her bedroom. If she needed to talk to her daughter, she had to text or call her. When sharing her experience, this sister spoke in a soft and gentle tone, without a hint of fear or complaint, but only the joy of hope in her voice. She believed the pandemic would soon pass. The pastor’s sermon was about the faith of Abraham and Sarah. Even though they did not see, they had faith. They persevered with patience, and received Isaac, the promised son whom they loved.

Deep in my heart I was touched by God’s gentle love, and I found hope again. “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths” (Proverbs 3:5–6). Even if God allows us to struggle for a long time in the pandemic, it is because of his will and purpose. And he will meet us where we are to provide all our needs.

Finally, let me end this testimony with a prayer from a sister in the Peking University Christian Alumni group:

Lord, if it is not because of your mercy, if you don’t give us a heart for repentance, if you don’t open our spiritual eyes, no one can come to you, and there will be no repentance from sin or deliverance from death. If a nation and its people do not honor you as God, that nation and its people have no real hope. Lord, have mercy, and let more people come to Christ. Let the gospel bring true revival to this troubled world so it may carry out its mission in God’s great salvation plan.

*This article was originally posted on the Newjingjie WeChat platform. The author later edited the article and added more content.*

## More about the Author

Yanke Zheng was born in Beijing. She was a student of chemistry at Peking University from 1992 to 1997 (including a year of military training). She currently lives in Colorado, USA. She came to the Lord in Evanston, Illinois on September 11, 1999, and was baptized at Midland, Michigan on June 17, 2000. Now she serves as a lay leader at a Chinese church in Colorado.

Her favorite Bible verse is “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:31).

*This testimony is found on pages 111–119 of 《从未名湖到生命泉 (一) : 百名北大学子的信仰之旅》 (Peking University Testimonies 1) available from [ReFrame Ministries](#).*

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<sup>i</sup> Translator’s note: In Chinese, Peking University is also referred to as “Yan Yuan.” The first character “yan” is also used in the author’s name

<sup>ii</sup> Translator’s note: lyrics from a Chinese contemporary worship song.